Press release

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Met Office site officially opened

1 November 2001

The site of the Met Office's new home in Exeter was officially opened in a ceremony today. It was attended by over 90 people who have helped the project reach this key milestone.

The first 'sod' at the site was cut by Chris Combe, the longest serving member of staff at the Met Office, and Tamasine Woods, the newest member of staff. Before that, guests were welcomed to the event by Met Office Chief Executive Peter Ewins, local MP Ben Bradshaw and John Lucken, Director of the Stratus Consortium which will build and operate the new buildings.

Speaking at the ceremony, Peter Ewins said: "A year ago we came to Exeter to announce our intention to make the city the home of our new headquarters and operations centre. Today's ceremony marks the formal beginning of work on site and means that the Met Office is firmly on the move. We are greatly looking forward to 2003 when we will start operating from our new buildings. Moving to Exeter will be good for the Met Office - our staff and their families and the quality of our science - good for our customers and, I hope, good for the people of Exeter."

The good wishes of Dr Lewis Moonie, Under Secretary of State at the MoD were passed on by Sir Roger Jackling, the Department's 2nd Permanent Under Secretary who said: "I am delighted the Met Office has reached this important milestone in the construction of its new head office and operations centre. The move to Exeter will enable it to offer improved services to its customers, at a price they can afford, and to increase investment in its research and development, infrastructure and people.

"The Ministry of Defence is proud of its long association with the Exeter area. The Met Office will build on the close links that already exist as it develops a long and happy relationship with the people of Exeter and its surroundings."

The search for a new location for the Met Office began late in 1999 when it became apparent that refurbishing the existing buildings in Bracknell, Berkshire, was not viable. In November 2000 Exeter was chosen, from a shortlist of four, as the 'preferred location' for the new building. July this year saw the Stratus consortium of Costain/Skanska and Group 4 Falck Global Solutions chosen as the 'preferred bidder' and agreement to proceed, worth some £150 million, was reached between the Met Office and Stratus at the beginning of October.

The move will inject over one thousand new jobs into the local economy in a series of staged moves from Bracknell to Exeter during 2003. The majority of staff are expected to move into the new building during the summer or early autumn of that year.

Notes:

The Met Office is an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence operating as a Trading Fund.

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